

The South Kelso Revitalization Plan

June 2013



PREPARED FOR THE CITY OF KELSO BY
CONFLUENCE PLANNING ASSOCIATES
PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY
MASTER OF URBAN & REGIONAL PLANNING PROGRAM

Overview

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Photo: City of Kelso



Kelso
Welcomes
You

STATE FARM
INSURANCE
JESSICA
MICKENS
AGENT

El Paisa

El Chomito
MEXICAN FOOD

Pine St

2 HOUR
PARKING
MON-FRI 9-5PM

2 HOUR
PARKING
MON-FRI 9-5PM

South



Kelso

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What is Revitalization?

To impart new life or vigor to: *bringing again into activity and prominence.*

Residents' ideas and solutions are at the heart of the South Kelso Revitalization Plan. By directly participating in the process and approving the final set of recommendations, the residents have defined revitalization on their own terms.

Residents' vision of a revitalized neighborhood stems from the short-term implementation of, and long-term investment in, programs and services that focus on both the people and the places of South Kelso. This revitalization plan aims to build capacity and empower the community to work toward the vision of the future South Kelso.

By focusing on both people and places, the South Kelso Revitalization Plan takes a comprehensive and holistic approach to revitalization.

Focus on People

Community investment in the people of South Kelso will leverage civic pride and volunteerism while increasing the capacities of the people through educational attainment. Revitalization solutions focused on people help to build capacity, increase self-sufficiency, empower communities, and build social capital.



Focus on Place

Solutions rooted in the physical environment will leverage South Kelso's historic small town charm, walkability, transportation access, natural amenities, and appealing aesthetics. Revitalization solutions focused on place help to attract investment, increase appeal and desirability of the community, create spaces for community gatherings, and help to retain and attract workforce talent.



“Efforts by leaders and volunteers to provide options are essential to improving South Kelso’s future and productivity.”

- South Kelso Resident

Vision

In the year 2034, the South Kelso neighborhood is one of the most desirable places to live in Cowlitz County. The vibrant commercial corridor centered on South Pacific Avenue provides neighbors with a majority of their daily needs, allowing them to walk or bike from their houses for shopping and other services and to support locally-owned businesses. Kelso is known throughout the region as being supportive and friendly to new and existing businesses with streamlined and efficient permitting processes. There are few commercial vacancies in downtown Kelso, and new businesses quickly move into available spaces. It’s hard to find a free table on a Friday and Saturday night in downtown Kelso restaurants and brewpubs.

South Kelso has become a tourist draw, with local businesses and boutiques offering a variety of goods and services that reflect the Pacific Northwest aesthetic and South Kelso’s heritage. South Pacific Avenue is lined with planter boxes, benches, and other pedestrian

amenities. Social activities hosted by the Kelso Downtown Association draw hundreds of people throughout the year, including the fourth of July parade and the annual tree lighting ceremony in Kelso Commons, known as Kelso’s “Living Room.”

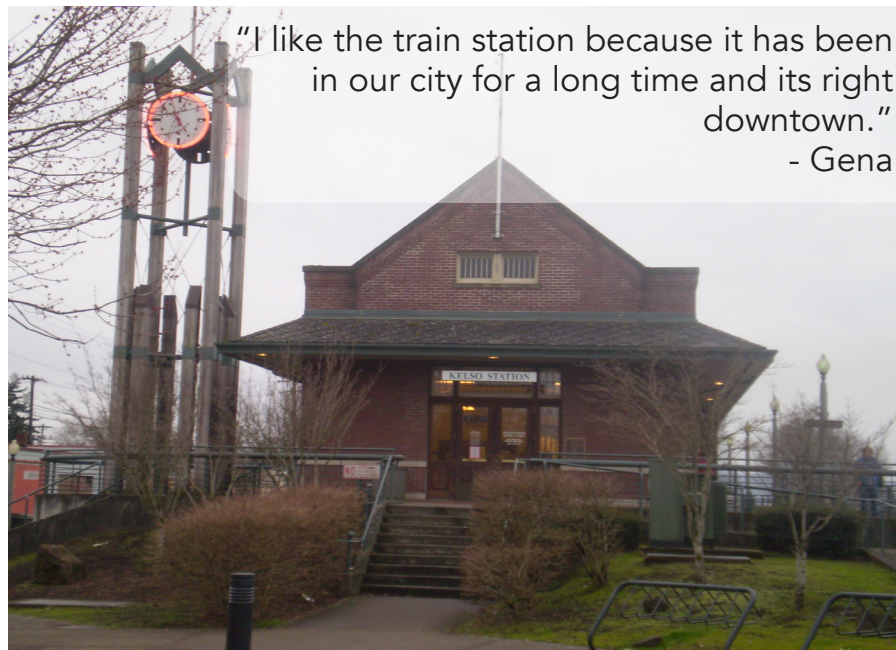
Every spring, the Neighborhood Association hosts a tour of historical bungalows in the area, ending with a community picnic along the Cowlitz River Trail. These tours and community events draw members from nearby communities such as Longview, Castle Rock, and Kalama.

The South Kelso community, including both longtime residents and recent arrivals, speak of the sense of community, the feeling of shared ownership, and pride in what South Kelso has become. Through the Neighborhood Association, neighbors regularly participate in work parties to maintain community spaces and enhance neighborhood appearance. Neighbors volunteer at both the Wallace Community School and South Kelso Community Center.

Kids in Kelso: Photojournalism Project



To help with the visioning process, the planning team enlisted the support of a 5th grade class at Wallace Elementary in South Kelso. These ten and eleven year-olds participated in a photojournalism project called Kids in Kelso. The students elaborated on questions such as 'Where will you bring your grandchildren when you are a grandparent?', and "Where is your favorite place to meet your friends in South Kelso?" The photos with youth narratives were displayed in downtown Kelso's local businesses, giving residents a chance to imagine possibilities for their neighborhood from the creative and open-minded perspective of a child.



Planning Process

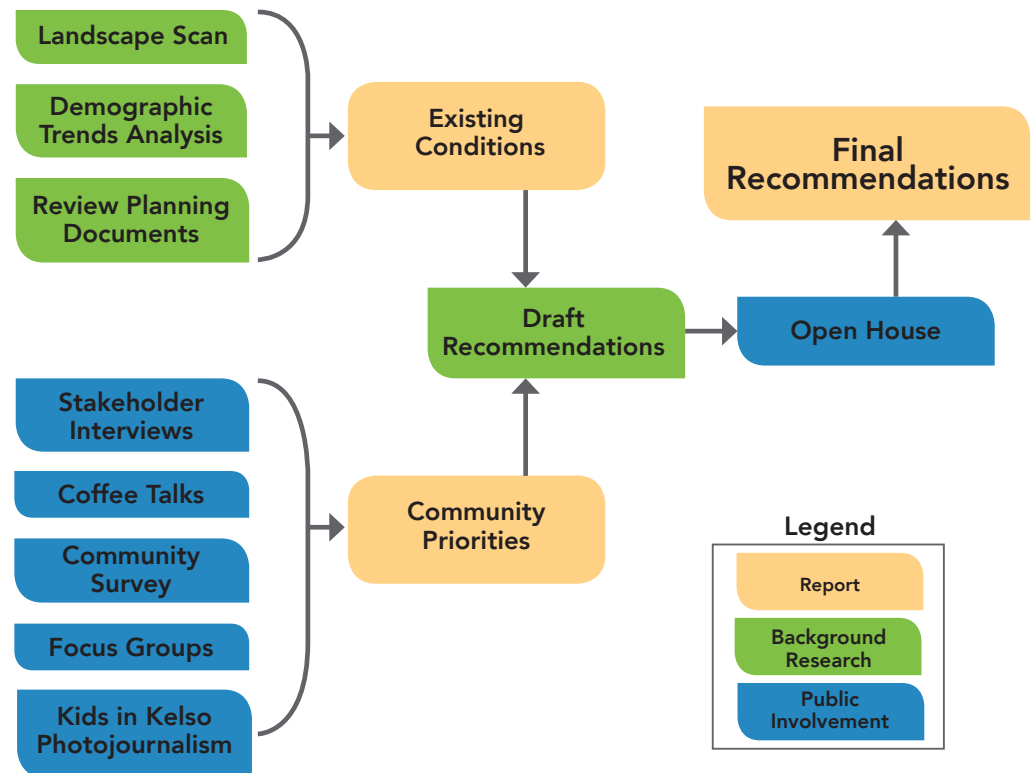
The South Kelso Revitalization Plan is based on six months of public outreach, research, and analysis.

The first step in our planning process consisted of **Background Research**. The planning team conducted an inventory of existing conditions, including assets and challenges.

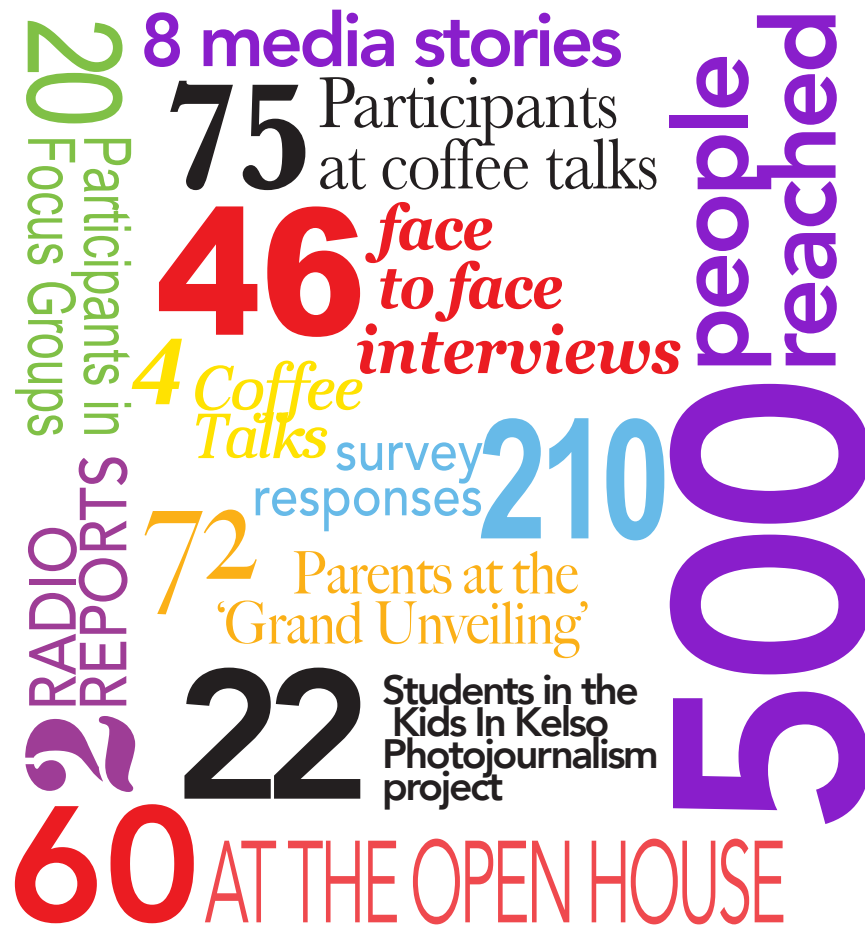
As part of an existing conditions analysis, the planning team reviewed:

- Existing planning documents relating to transportation, housing, downtown revitalization, economic development, education, and social services.
- Social support efforts in the South Kelso Neighborhood.
- Key demographics and trends relating to population, ethnicity, income, and other indicators.
- Access to parks, healthy food, transportation, and exposure to environmental toxins.

A core component of the planning process was **Public Outreach**. The planning team developed the Activate South Kelso (ASK!) logo and outreach campaign to build identity and consistency for the process. The campaign included public events and feedback opportunities designed to reach South Kelso residents of all ages, demographics, and interest levels.



Outreach



In order to gain comprehensive understanding of the condition and concerns of the South Kelso community, the planning team conducted extensive public outreach. Public involvement in the development of the South Kelso Revitalization Plan was considered an integral component of background analysis. To connect with South Kelso residents, the team employed a variety of outreach efforts and feedback opportunities so that the great diversity of lifestyles in the South Kelso community would be represented in the community prioritization process.

The planning team accomplished this through the use of two coffee talks, two focus groups, more than forty one-on-one interviews, intercept and online surveys (which resulted in more than 210 responses), a Community Open House, and a Grand Unveiling of the Kids in Kelso artwork, which drew more than seventy-five participants. The ASK! Outreach Campaign allowed the planning team to speak with roughly 500 Kelso residents regarding their concerns and priorities for the South Kelso neighborhood.

The Kids in Kelso photojournalism project was a keystone component of the outreach campaign. To help in the visioning process, twenty-two fifth grade students from Wallace Elementary School were loaned cameras to photograph people and places in the community that were significant to them. Students' descriptions of their photos enhanced the planning team's understanding of the challenges of the community, as well as what is cherished.

The ASK! Outreach Campaign identified the following community priorities:

- Reduce drug use and gang activity
- Family wage jobs for South Kelso residents
- Develop fun and safe activities for children and teens
- Fix streets, sidewalks, and crossings
- Encourage upkeep of yards and homes

More information on identified community priorities can be found in Appendix (K).

"The slogan 'We Are Kelso' means a lot for all of us." -South Kelso Resident

The planning team engaged in continual **Synthesis and Analysis**, gathering information from the South Kelso community, piecing it together, testing local assumptions, listening to the neighborhood's narrative, and ultimately informing the recommended strategies.

The planning team developed a strategic plan of specific **Recommendations** to be implemented by local stakeholder groups to revitalize South Kelso's residential and commercial core.

Research on best practices as identified in regional revitalization efforts informed strategy recommendations. Case studies of these programs and initiatives offered by similarly-sized governments and agencies have been included in strategy sections of the implementation manual.

Multiple criteria were considered to identify locally-feasible and effective recommendations. When determining the value of each recommendation, the following criteria were considered:

- The strategy's ability to address the needs and priorities expressed by the community
- Proven effectiveness and credence in the planning community
- Likelihood for reaching objectives within the short and long term
- Local staffing capacity and availability of lead implementers
- Likelihood for meeting multiple objectives and catalyzing future action and programs
- Funding availability
- Identification of a community champion or partner



Photo: John Versue



Photo: Beth Otto

Existing Conditions

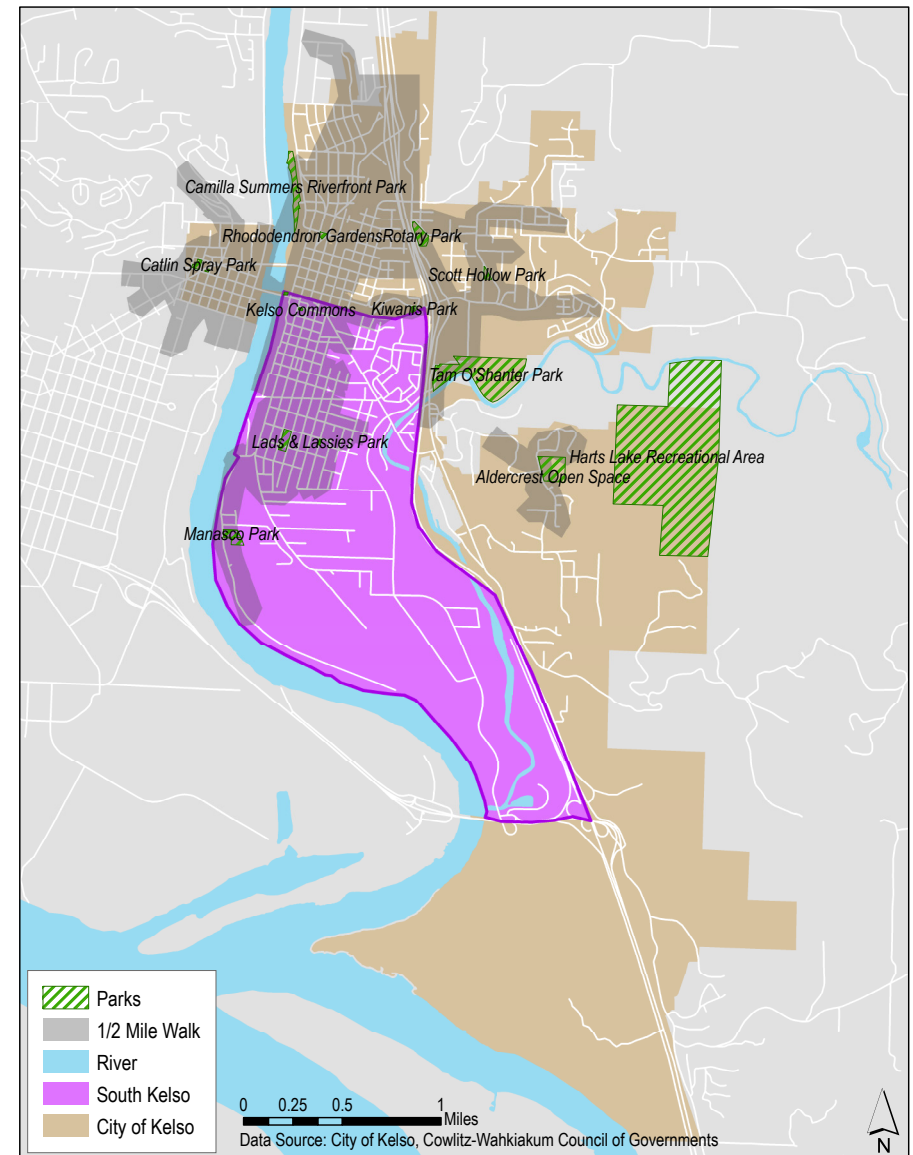
The planning team started by reviewing and compiling existing research, with specificity on the geographic parameters of South Kelso when data was available. The team then turned to getting feedback directly from the residents.

Existing Conditions Research

Education & Employment- Indicators of social and economic health show a disadvantaged community in South Kelso with significant change in the past decade.

- 75% of adult residents have completed high school, though less than 7% have completed college or an advanced degree.
- As of 2010, more than 25% of the South Kelso population is younger than 18 years of age, and elementary school enrollment is on the rise.
- South Kelso reports higher rates of unemployment than the city as a whole, and 48% of housing in the neighborhood is renter-occupied.
- The median household income has decreased 14% since 2000.
- Many Kelso residents aren't employed in Kelso, which leads to increased transportation costs to commute to work.
- Many households aren't making ends meet: 7 out of 10 spend 45% or more on housing and transportation costs. Over half of South Kelso residents are living below the poverty line.

Access to Parks in South Kelso



"I would love to be able to walk down South Pacific to the grocery store."

– South Kelso Resident

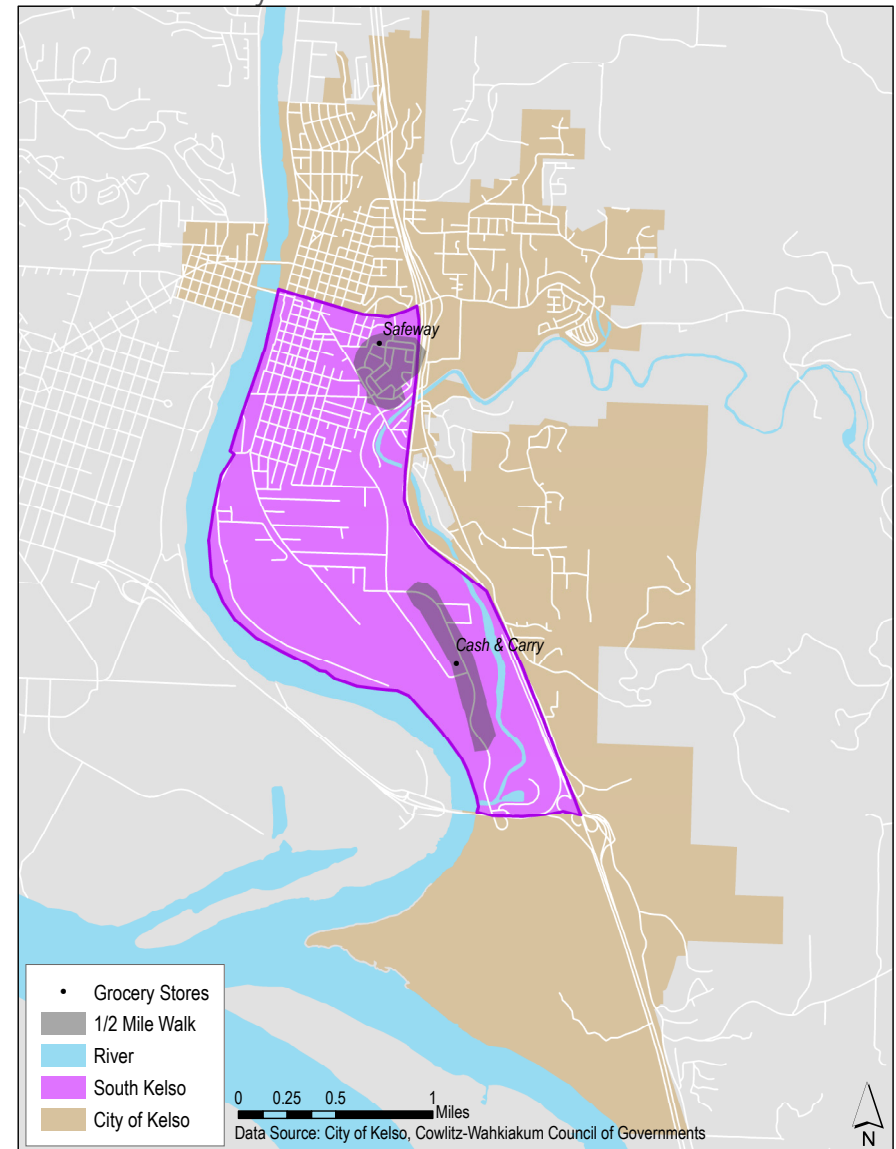
Access- The majority of South Kelso residents live within a half-mile walking distance to a park, the exception being the southern, industrial portion of the neighborhood. Currently park use is inhibited by high crime rates and a lack of programming.

Healthy food access is limited, with a very small portion of the neighborhood being within the recommended half-mile walking distance of the two sources of healthful food. Based on the USDA's definition, South Kelso qualifies as a food desert.

According to The United States Department of Agriculture, Food Deserts are "areas devoid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas."

Pedestrian Connectivity- South Kelso's existing infrastructure shows considerable potential for a highly walkable neighborhood in terms of a dense street grid and proximity to schools, businesses, and employment centers. Filling in missing sidewalks, curb cuts, and street crossings would increase the walkability of the neighborhood for all residents.

Access to Healthy Food in South Kelso



Community Input

The comments we received at public events were focused around three broad topic areas: community assets, problems, and solutions.

Assets

- Wallace Elementary is a strong, positive force for the neighborhood.
- Friendly small town charm, pride, and sense of community. The quiet neighborhood and the “old charm” of houses.
- In general, the neighborhood was considered safe. Dangerous areas are street-specific.
- The police play a positive role in neighborhood safety.

Problems

- High drug use and crime.
- Low education attainment rates.
- Hungry and bored youth.
- High transient population, rental turnover.
- Lack of community, no opportunities for connection or social capital building.
- Difficult relations between businesses and the City.
- Abandoned buildings and absentee landlords.
- The lack of proper infrastructure and upkeep of streets, roads, and houses.
- The need for economic development, jobs, and a revitalized commercial downtown.
- The need for more/better space for children to play, with increased safety and programming.

Solutions

- A neighborhood association and community groups (i.e. historic homeowners group).
- Celebration of Kelso’s history. Historical highlights (i.e. historical murals).



Photo: City of Kelso

- Improve access to parks along the river and landscaping for neighborhood beautification.
- Coordinated volunteer networks for neighborhood cleanup and painting days.
- Address the source of empty lots and abandoned houses. Offer both disincentives (i.e. tax penalties) and incentives (grants and other financing mechanisms).
- Hold community events like street fairs and block parties to encourage people to socialize with their neighbors.
- Develop a community center with free events and programs for all ages, including a community garden and life skills education.

Further information on the Existing Conditions Findings are in Appendix (H).

Focus Areas & Strategies

The South Kelso Revitalization Plan consists of five focus areas and ten strategies. The details of each strategy, including implementation steps, partners, and a timeline, can be found in the Implementation Manual.

Focus Area: Community Organization

Strategy 1: Form a Neighborhood Association.

The Neighborhood Association will provide an organizational structure and venue for community participation, communication, and will forge fruitful partnerships between the City, residents, School District, service organizations, and donors.

Focus Area: Public Safety

Strategy 2: Develop a Neighborhood Crime and Safety Plan.

Residents can work toward a crime-free, drug-free, and gang-free neighborhood by collaboratively creating a Neighborhood Crime and Safety Plan with the City, public safety agencies, social service organizations, and community leaders.

Focus Area: Community Gathering Places

Strategy 3: Improve Parks and Public Spaces.

This strategy enhances existing parks and public spaces, and identifies the steps needed to revive them as integral community asset for play, exercise, and relaxation.

Strategy 4: Establish Wallace Elementary as a Community School.

Community schools integrate academic support, health and social services, and youth and community development, in order to achieve improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities.

Strategy 5: Build a South Kelso Community Center.

The Community Center—which will house the Kelso Public Library, a youth center, and a senior center—will provide a venue for Kelso residents of all ages to participate in activities and strengthen community connection and pride.

Focus Area: Pedestrian Safety and Neighborhood Appearance

Strategy 6: Conduct a Pedestrian Mobility and Safety Audit.

A comprehensive assessment of the pedestrian realm will help to accurately characterize location-specific concerns and identify areas where additional maintenance and improvements are needed. Infrastructure improvement allocations based on this inventory will ensure more equitable and efficient distribution of City funds.

Strategy 7: Improve Housing and Neighborhood Appearance.

By targeting incentive programs to problem sources, the City can improve housing conditions, create a stronger local housing market, and build confidence in the long-term growth potential of the South Kelso Neighborhood.

Focus Area: Downtown Revitalization

Strategy 8: Revive and Restructure the Main Street Association.

Main Street programs help align City and business community efforts to make the downtown more active, vibrant, and prosperous for all to enjoy. Main Street programs engage in beautification efforts, coordinate public activities, and promote downtown businesses and social events.

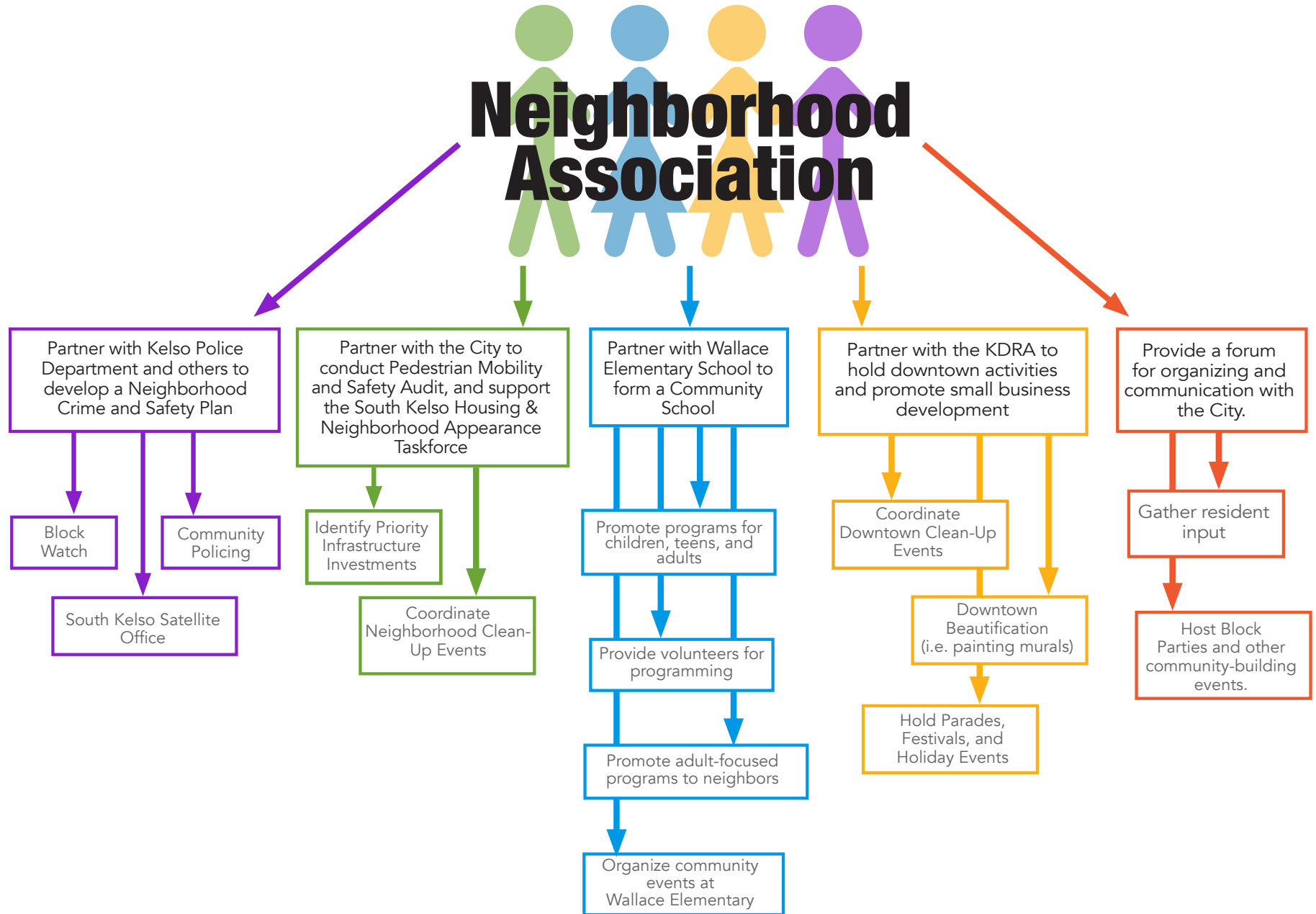
Strategy 9: Coordinate Business Support Services through an Economic Gardening Initiative.

The City's Economic Gardening Initiative will support both new and existing businesses by streamlining access to business training, and support services, and by providing market research typically available only to large firms. This program will build the reputation that the City of Kelso is "open for business."

Strategy 10: Implement Streetscape Improvements to Revitalize South Pacific Avenue.

Streetscape projects brighten the public right-of-way with physical improvements to create an inviting pedestrian environment. These actions build community pride, increase the marketability of the district, and show that the City is investing in South Kelso.

Neighborhood Association




Implementation Matrix




Focus Area: Community Organization

| Strategy 1: Form a Neighborhood Association | | | |
|---|---|--|-----------------------------|
| Objective: The Neighborhood Association will provide a structure for South Kelso residents to come together to determine the most pressing community needs, accomplish specific neighborhood goals, and communicate information to the right people at the right time. | Step 1: City Community Development Department applies for funding grants Step 2: City hires a Community Coach Step 3: Community Coach recruits members and convenes a series of 'Kick-Off' meetings Step 4: Community Coach leads the Association to incorporate as a non-profit organization Step 5: Neighborhood Association implements a series of community programs | Lead Agency: Kelso Community Development Department Partners: Kelso Police Department, Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, non-profit organizations, Kelso Housing Authority, philanthropic organizations | |
| | | Short Term 1-18 months | Medium Term 18-36 months |
| | |  | |



Focus Area: Public Safety

| Strategy 2: Develop a Neighborhood Crime and Safety Plan | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| Objective: The Neighborhood Crime and Safety Plan will bring together various agencies under a common cause, centralize data, leverage existing efforts, imagine shared resources and responsibilities in new programs, involve the proposed Neighborhood Association, and motivate residents to educate themselves through and participate in safety programs. | Step 1: The Kelso Police Department convenes the Regional Safety Coalition that is composed of multi-agency stakeholders to develop a Neighborhood Crime and Safety Plan (NCSP) Step 2: The regional Safety Coalition promote the NCSP to increase neighborhood participation by conducting an Outreach Campaign | Lead Agency: Kelso Police Department Partners: Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, Kelso School District, Kelso Police Department, Cowlitz 2 Fire & Rescue, Cowlitz County Sheriff's office, Longview Police Department, Peacehealth St. John Medical Center | |
| | | Short Term 1-18 months | Medium Term 18-36 months |
| | | |  |




Focus Area: Community Gathering Places

| Strategy 3: Improve Parks and Public Spaces | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| Objective: Restoring South Kelso's existing parks and public areas into positive places will allow residents of all ages to engage in a variety of activities and restore a sense of community cohesion. | Step 1: The Neighborhood Association launches South Kelso Investing in Parks (SKIP) Campaign Step 2: The Parks and Recreation Department assesses current park usage and identifies desired additional uses Step 3: The Parks and Recreation Department develops programming and activities for neighborhood residents of all ages Step 4: The Parks and Recreation Department expands or enhances parks facilities | Lead Agency: Public Works Partners: Kelso Neighborhood Associations, Local service organizations, Kelso School District | | |
| | | Short Term 1-18 months | Medium Term 18-36 months | Long Term 36+ months |
| | |  | | |
| Strategy 4: Establish Wallace Elementary as a Community School | | | | |
| Objective: The Community School will utilize Wallace Elementary as a social hub to provide coordinated educational and social services for students, their families, and neighborhood residents. | Step 1: The Kelso School District identifies and convenes necessary service partners Step 2: The School District hires a Community School Coordinator Step 3: The Community School Coordinator designs programs and services that meet the needs of students and the community | Lead Agencies: Kelso School District Partners: City of Kelso, Cowlitz County, Child Welfare Authorities, local hospitals, local community colleges | | |
| | | Short Term 1-18 months | Medium Term 18-36 months | Long Term 36+ months |
| | | |  | |
| Strategy 5: Build a South Kelso Community Center | | | | |
| Objective: The Community Center will provide a place where Kelso residents of all ages can come together to participate in activities and strengthen community connection and pride. | Step 1: The City of Kelso identifies and convenes potential project partners Step 2: The City of Kelso selects a location Step 3: The City of Kelso identifies programs and services to be offered | Potential Partners: City of Kelso Partners: Cowlitz County, Kelso School District, Lower Columbia College | | |
| | | Short Term 1-18 months | Medium Term 18-36 months | Long Term 36+ months |
| | | | |  |

Focus Area: Housing and Neighborhood Appearance

| Strategy 6: Conduct a Pedestrian Mobility and Safety Audit | | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Objective: The Pedestrian Mobility and Safety Audit will create a detailed record of the condition of the pedestrian environment in Kelso to allow for the efficient and equitable allocation of City resources in the future. | Step 1: The City of Kelso creates a Pedestrian Mobility and Safety Task Force Step 2: The City of Kelso conducts an audit briefing Step 3: The Pedestrian Mobility and Safety Task Force conducts a Pedestrian Mobility and Safety Audit Step 4: The City of Kelso prioritizes City funds to problem areas | Lead Agency: Kelso Public Works and Community Development Department Partners: Neighborhood Associations, Kelso Community Development Department, KDRA | | |
| | | Short Term 1-18 months | Medium Term 18-36 months | Long Term + months |
| | |  | | |
| Strategy 7: Housing and Neighborhood Appearance | | | | |
| Objective: Upkeep of neighborhood housing stock and infrastructure investment will give both residents and property investors confidence in the South Kelso housing market, leading to additional investment and a sense of community pride. | Step 1: The City of Kelso creates a South Kelso Housing and Neighborhood Appearance Taskforce (the Taskforce) Step 2: The Taskforce conducts a ‘Windshield Survey’ Step 3: The City builds a Housing Appearance and Land Ownership map Step 4: The City enforces current regulations and explores potential incentive and assistance programs | Lead Agency: Kelso Community Development Department Partners: South Kelso Neighborhood Association, Kelso Public Schools, Local Service Organizations, Alumni Associations | | |
| | | Short Term 1-18 months | Medium Term 18-36 months | Long Term 36+ months |
| | |  | | |

Focus Area: Downtown Revitalization

| Strategy 8: Revive and Restructure the Main Street Effort | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Objective: The Main Street program will work to beautify the downtown core, help coordinate public events to draw visitors on evenings and weekends, promote the downtown as a destination, fill empty storefronts with new local businesses, and help improve the physical design of downtown spaces. | Step 1: The KDRA selects a volunteer to serve as Executive Director Step 2: The KDRA invites additional public and private organizations to join Step 3: The KDRA establishes the five sub-committees necessary to do the work of a Main Street Association Step 4: The KDRA invites staff from the Washington State Main Street Program to facilitate a retreat Step 5: The KDRA identifies and executes a small number of visible, low-hanging fruit projects to gain momentum | Lead Agency: City of Kelso City Manager's Office Partners: KDRA, Local Businesses, Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments | | |
| | | Short Term 1-18 months | Medium Term 18-36 months | Long Term 36+ months |
| | | |  | |
| Strategy 9: Coordinate business support services through an Economic Gardening Initiative | | | | |
| Objective: Economic Gardening supports new and existing businesses by streamlining access to business training and support services, and by providing market research that is usually only available to large firms. It is an approach to economic development that is centered on the entrepreneur, rather than the location of their business. | Step 1: The City of Kelso identifies and convenes an Economic Gardening Advisory Committee of appropriate stakeholders in the region Step 2: The City of Kelso conducts a review of internal processes associated with business development Step 3: The City of Kelso develops an Economic Gardening Initiative Step 4: The City of Kelso launches and promotes the Kelso Economic Gardening Initiative | Lead Agency: City of Kelso City Manager's Office Partners: KDRA, Local Businesses, Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments | | |
| | | Short Term 1-18 months | Medium Term 18-36 months | Long Term 36+ months |
| | | | |  |
| Strategy 10: Implement Streetscape Improvement to Revitalize South Pacific Avenue | | | | |
| Objective: Streetscape projects brighten the public right-of-way with physical improvements to create an inviting pedestrian and commercial environment. | Step 1: The City of Kelso convenes a representative stakeholder group to plan the streetscape improvements Step 2: The City of Kelso develops an implementation strategy | Lead Agency: City of Kelso Community Development Department Partners: Kelso Public Works, KDRA | | |
| | | Short Term 1-18 months | Medium Term 18-36 months | Long Term 36+ months |
| | | | |  |